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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001104

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO A/S SILVERBERG AND PDAS WARLICK  
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/KUMAR/PHEE  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/GAVITO

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: TENSION PREVAILS FOLLOWING MORE TRIPOLI  
CLASHES

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. William Grant for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) On July 25-26, fierce clashes resumed in the predominantly Sunni Bab al-Tabbaneh and predominantly Alawite Jabal Mohsen areas of Tripoli, reportedly resulting in between six and nine dead and 33 wounded. The Internal Security Forces (ISF) and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) redeployed in Tripoli with orders to retaliate to gunfire, though some residents complain that the security forces "only move in after the fighting has stopped."

2. (SBU) Despite the cautious calm that prevailed over Tripoli on July 27-28, the situation remains tense. Press reported that these renewed clashes have displaced more than 2,000 families. Some interlocutors accuse the opposition of intentionally stirring up the conflict to put pressure on the majority to complete the ministerial statement. End summary.

LAF AND ISF ASSUME  
STRONGER RULES OF  
ENGAGEMENT

3. (SBU) On July 25-26, fierce clashes involving rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and machine guns occurred on the main road that separates the pro-majority Sunni district of Bab al-Tabbaneh and the pro-opposition Alawite district of Jabal Mohsen, breaking the tense calm that had prevailed in the northern city of Tripoli since July 9. Conflicting press reports indicate that as many as nine persons were killed during the two days of fighting.

4. (C) Following a security meeting on July 26, Interior Minister Ziad Baroud and Internal Security Forces (ISF) Director General Ashraf Rifi stated publicly that matters will be dealt with "firmly." Declaring the ISF's rules of engagement, Rifi said that the ISF will retaliate against "any source of fire and arrest any armed person."

5. (C) The LAF similarly redeployed in the afflicted areas, according to an LAF source, who reported to the RSO that the ISF is taking responsibility for the outer perimeter while the LAF is deployed to the inner perimeter. The source, affirming that the LAF is in "react-mode," explained that the population is "too congested" for a more rigorous response. Local press reported that, for the first time since the

intermittent clashes in Tripoli erupted, the LAF has retaliated to gunfire.

¶6. (C) Faisal Karame, son of former Prime Minister Omar Karame, praised the LAF's decision to retaliate at the source of fire, saying, "All political parties in Tripoli lifted their political cover from any insubordinate operatives." Meanwhile, another contact complained to PolOff that the LAF and ISF "only move in after the gunfire has stopped."

"CAUTIOUS CALM" PREVAILS;  
WEAPONS MUST BE CONFISCATED  
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¶7. (C) MP Mustafa Allouch, a member of the pro-majority Future Movement from Tripoli, called the situation in Tripoli "cautiously calm" during a July 28 telephone call with LES senior political advisor. According to Allouch, unless the situation changes drastically, the political situation in Lebanon will shift in the opposition's favor. Allouch added that there are several Sunni groups in Tripoli involved in the fighting and concluded that people in Tripoli are turning to radical groups because Future Movement leader Saad Hariri is "not delivering on the ground."

¶8. (C) March 14 Tripoli MP Mosbah Ahdab also told PolStaff on July 28 that despite the halt in fighting, the tension remains high, adding that, "It is not really over because there is no clear solution yet. Unless the weapons are withdrawn from both parties, nothing will be resolved." He suggested that the weapons should also be confiscated from

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the Islamic Unification Movement, which he purports is funded by Hizballah.

ECONOMIC SITUATION  
SUFFERS DUE TO CLASHES  
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¶9. (C) Dr. Mustapha Adib, Director of the Tripoli-based NGO, CESMO, described to EmbOff on July 28 the situation as a "fragile truce." The situation is very bad, he lamented, relaying that people remain tense and are losing their trust in the LAF. He noted the deteriorating economic situation in Tripoli, explaining that the residents of the affected areas are very poor and because they earn their wages on a daily basis, their income is directly impacted by the fighting. According to Adib, there are 900 displaced families taking shelter in various schools in Tripoli.

¶10. (C) Adib reported that all of Tripoli, not only Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen, was closed completely during the clashes. He accused the LAF of withdrawing once the clashes resumed. Adib interpreted the clashes as "a pressure tool to get the ministerial statement the way they (the opposition) want it." Adib reported that he witnessed fully-burnt buildings during a visit to the predominately Sunni Kobbeh area, near Jabal Mohsen.

MORE THAN 2,000  
FAMILIES DISPLACED  
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¶12. (SBU) Local press reported that the clashes displaced more than 2,000 families. Tripoli municipality chief Mohammed Rashid Jamali told AFP that 1,500 people have been taking shelter in eight schools across the city. Jamali expected that nearly half of the displaced would return to their homes over the next few days, while others, whose homes have been severely damaged or destroyed, will have to wait "much longer." Certain roads remain blocked in the area and the ISF is diverting traffic to outer roads.

¶13. (SBU) Addressing the issue of the displaced families, the Mufti of Tripoli Malek al-Chaar expressed wonder "at how

the LAF, that was capable of uprooting the presence of (extremist leader) Shaker al-Absi from the Naher al-Barid camp is incapable of stopping the hands of evil in Tripoli." Moreover, he said, "It is unacceptable for Tripoli to be the stage for exerting pressure on the cabinet and ministerial statement."

GRANT